FIDELITY SMILING IN DEATH.

SOME

ELEGIAC THOUGHTS,

OCCASIONED BY THE

DEATH

OF THE

Rev. JOHN FLETCHER,

Late VICAR of MADELY.

By *RICHARD PIERCY.*

His GOD ſuſtains Him in His final Hour;
His final Hour brings Glory to His GOD.

YOUNG.

Be thou faithful unto Death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life. Rev. ii. 10.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR EDWARD SIMMONS,
No. 59, BARBICAN, 1785.

[PRICE SIX-PENCE.]

W. Musgrave.

BRITISH MUSEUM

PREFACE.

THIS Kind of Writing may perhaps be ſlighted by ſome, and cenſured by others; as if what is ſpoken of the Deceaſed was to be conſidered in a great Meaſure as only the Language of Flattery or Fancy: or, at leaſt, not much to be depended on, as not ſufficiently keeping within the Limits of Truth. And the Poem, or Hiſtory, in which ſuch a Liberty is taken, I leave to the Author (if he can) to clear from the Charge of *Levity*, or *Lying*.

To embalm the Memory of thoſe whoſe Characters ſhould rather lie buried with their Bodies in Darkneſs and Oblivion, by varniſhing over their Vices, to encourage others to follow their *pernicious Ways;* thus making Poetry a Perfume for Wickedneſs, is worthy of Ahhorrence.

Nor

Nor let me be underſtood to plead for thus publiſhing the Characters of good men in general, or of all Miniſters: Much leſs for giving falſe Accounts of any, however dignified, either with natural or moral Accompliſhments.

But when a Star of the firſt Magnitude diſappears; when an eminently good and uſeful Perſon, eſpecially a Miniſter of Chriſt, one for whom God has done *great Things*, and who by Divine Grace has done great Things for God; when ſuch a Perſon leaves the World, who can ſay, it is improper to hold up his Character before the Faces of Survivors, to animate their Souls to greater Zeal and Diligence in the important Buſineſs of Religion? Why are the Characters of ſo many given us in the Bible?

And whether Mr. FLETCHER was not an extraordinary excellent and uſeful Character, I appeal to all impartial diſcerning Chriſtians that knew him. I know he differed in ſome controverted Points from many others; nor would I ſpeak of him or any other uninſpired Perſon, as infallible;

but for ſerious Diligence, Zeal, and Uſefulneſs, I think ſome that knew him far more intimately than I, will readily give it as their Judgment, that he has not left many, if any Equals.

And as his Life was uncommonly exemplary, ſo his Death was peaceful and triumphant, as Mrs. FLETCHER's Letter to Mr. WESLEY informs us.

O Reader, thy Turn is coming. Lay the ſolemn Conſideration deeply to Heart, and without Delay prepare to meet thy God.

September 23, 1785. R. P.

BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

TO

Mrs. FLETCHER.

MADAM! permit a Friend, unknown by Face,
YOUR NAME by this ſlight Monument to place.
Tho' Death has now the *Nuptial-Tye* diſjoin'd,
And you awhile on Earth are left behind;
Tho' great your Loſs, and juſt a Widow's Sigh,
Greater your Help, and juſter ſtill your Joy.
You know your Refuge—Lift your Eyes above!
There dwells ETERNAL LIFE, ETERNAL LOVE.
May HIS unfailing Care your Steps attend,
And HIS rich Grace all needful Comforts ſend,
Till with your SPOUSE, and SAINTS, and ANGELS bright,
You meet triumphant in the Realms of Light,
To caſt your Crowns before the Throne, and ſing
Immortal Praiſes to your SAVIOUR-KING.

R. P.

SOME

ELEGIAC THOUGHTS, &c.

I.

ITS ceaſeleſs Round the Wheel of Nature rolls,
And changing Seaſons meaſure out the Year;
Nor to our Eyes beneath the ſhining Poles
Does ought but Mutability appear.

II.

The tall majeſtic Tree, that waving towers
O'er the bleak Hill, or fertile Vale, its Head,
Low verdant Herbs, and variegated Flowers,
Now flouriſh fair, and now dejected fade.

III.

Inſects that on Earth's ſpacious Surface creep,
And Birds that cut the ſtill more ſpacious Air,
The finny Race diſporting in the deep,
And ſylvan Tribes a like Decay muſt bear.

IV. Nor

IV.

Nor is the Sov'reign of the changing Scene,
At whoſe proud Feet the ſubject Creatures lie,
Exempt himſelf: Altho' the Thought may pain,
'Tis true as ſolemn—*Man is born to die.*

V.

To die! Is this the Doom of Adam's Race?
The Doom of all, the Precious and the Vile,
The daring Sinner, and the Child of Grace,
Muſt both become the griſly Tyrant's Spoil?

VI.

'Tis vain to queſtion—Hark! what mean thoſe Groans?
Why flow thoſe Tears down from unnumber'd Eyes?
Mothers with Daughters, Fathers with their Sons,
Mingling their ſilent, yet loud-ſpeaking Sighs?

VII.

Alas, too ſoon the Cauſe of Grief is found,
Nor can it be conceal'd—*Great FLETCHER's dead!*
Great FLETCHER's dead! the plaintive Skies reſound;
And thro' the Land the doleful Tidings ſpread.

VIII. Thus

VIII.

Thus then behold that not the Herd alone
Of ſenſual, ſinful, and ungodly Men;
But with the Darts by this dire Monſter thrown,
The juſteſt, holieſt, beſt, alike are ſlain.

IX.

But ſhould my Lays his Qualities rehearſe,
And give a true Deſcription of his Worth;
How many might deride the faithful Verſe,
And ſay, ſuch Virtues are too high for Earth?

X.

Or ſhould I mention what he was and did,
I thus might aggravate the Mourner's Grief:
And Chriſtian Love and Tenderneſs forbid
To wound the Wounded, or refuſe Relief.

XI.

Yet Gratitude and Juſtice both require
A due Memorial of ſo great a Man:
Envy and Slander then aſham'd retire,
Or hiſs, and dart your forked Tongues in vain.

XII.

And you whoſe broken Hearts with Sorrows heave
Beneath the Preſſure of ſo great a Loſs!
Your Minds compoſe: Perhaps you may receive
Balm for your Wounds, and Strength to bear your Croſs.

XIII.

And is it not a Tribute that we owe
To GOD, His Works and Wonders to record?
Was our Friend great? 'Twas Grace that made him so;
And all the Glory's due unto the LORD.

XIV.

He gave him Breath, his ample Mind He form'd,
With uſeful Sciences ſo richly fraught;
His Soul with ſweet cœleſtial Grace adorn'd,
Far too ſublime for Words to reach or *Thought.

XV.

As ſhines the Silver Queen of Night among
A Thouſand twinkling Lamps that gild the Sky,
So did his Luſtre beam amidſt a Throng
Of ſmaller Lights that faintlier glitter'd by.

XVI.

Amongſt his num'rous Friends, ye favour'd Claſs,
Who living near his bright Example ſaw,
Forgive if I (as ſeeing through a Glaſs†,
Tho' fair) a too imperfect Picture draw.

* What Language can expreſs, or human Mind conceive, in the preſent dark imperfect State, the Excellency of that divine Nature of which true Chriſtians are Partakers? Or, how important Faith, Hope, and Love are, when we conſider the Objects of them, and the Felicity to which they tend.

† Viz. The Atteſtations of Friends, together with various Productions of his own Pen.

XVII. But

XVII.

But not ſuch Mediums only do I truſt;
My favour'd Eyes have ſeen his heav'nly Face;
My favour'd Ears can make their pleaſing Boaſt,
As witneſſing his Lips diſtil with Grace.

XVIII.

'Twas on that ſolemn Time * when he appear'd
Juſt on the Precipice of Life to ſtand:
But Pray'r was made, and God his Servant ſpar'd,
And lent him longer to a ſinful Land.

XIX.

But ah! how ſoon my Interviews were o'er,
And Diſtance held him from my longing Eyes,
Till Death thus ſpeaks, *Expect the Sight no more,*
But own the Hand that governs Earth and Skies.

XX.

Yet be his bleſſed Image ſtill impreſt
Deep in my Mind, and ſhining in my Lays,
Stand as a Monument of Love confeſt,
And ſpeak his Worth to God his Saviour's Praiſe.

* Toward the End of the Year 1776, in the October of which Year I firſt had an Interview and Converſation with him, though we had written to each other before.

XXI. His

XXI.

His Head how wiſe! his Heart how full of Love!
His Hands how open to relieve Diſtreſs!
How ſwift his Feet in Ways that lead above!
His Tongue how ready to entreat and bleſs!

XXII.

While with a Garb, in Truth's unerring Sight
Of great Account, he did himſelf array,
The Robe of ſweet Humility, ſo bright,
It ſhed around him mild celeſtial Day.

XXIII.

Witneſs his Friends, witneſs his favour'd Flock,
For whoſe dear Sakes he took ſuch pleaſing Pains;
For though the brittle Thread of Life is broke,
His grateful Mem'ry yet behind remains.

XXIV.

Juſt as the Sun that Maker of our Days,
After its Courſe, on a fair Summer's Eve,
When ſunk beneath th' Horizon leaves its Rays,
So does his ſhining Life departed live.

XXV.

His Race is run, his Courſe with ſacred Joy
Is now concluded—O how calm he ſet,
Behind a Cloud ting'd with a purple Dye,
The Harbinger of his approaching Fate!

XXVI. How

XXVI.

How didſt thou then, O Partner of his Life,
When Death around his gloomy Enſigns ſpread,
Feel all the fond Emotions of a Wife,
And from the ſolemn Scene ſhrink back with Dread!

XXVII.

Short was his Illneſs, or from Jacob's Race,
In diſtant Parts what Pray'rs had pierc'd the Sky!
And who can tell but then the God of Grace
Had heard, and turn'd the fatal Arrow by?

XXVIII.

Who knows but then his Servant might have liv'd,
To praiſe with Thouſands his Deliv'rer's Care?
As once a threatning Sickneſs he ſurviv'd,
Which lingring on, gave longer Time for Prayer.

XXIX.

But now by Heav'n's diſpoſing wiſe Decree,
How quick remov'd beyond the Reach of Prayer!
The Stroke was given and paſt the fatal Day,
Before his Illneſs reach'd my mournful Ear.

XXX.

But Oh the ſweet cœleſtial Beams that ſhone
Around the Bed of this departing Saint!
His faithful Saviour left him not alone,
Nor without Cordials let his Spirits faint.

XXXI.

How was his Soul upborne on Eagles Wings,
Beyond Mortality to Realms above!
How did he ſlight at all Times earthly Things,
But more when raptured with eternal Love!

XXXII.

When* wiſhing for a Guſt to ſend the Sound
Of GOD IS LOVE throughout the ſpacious Ball,
That all the Nations of the World around
Might hear, and make Eternal Love their All.

XXXIII.

His dying Wiſh, ye Friends of him and God
Fulfil; nor thou be-ſilent O my Song!
Shout GOD IS LOVE! and ſend the Truth abroad,
While diſtant Skies waft the ſweet Sounds along.

XXXIV.

O† World! O Church! to both I turn my Speech;
And with peculiar Emphaſis to Thee,
O *Madeley!* if theſe Words ſhall ever reach
Thy Ears, once favoured with his Miniſtry.

XXXV. How

* See Mrs. FLETCHER's Letter to the Rev. Mr. WESLEY.

† *Men of the World*, as well as *Members of the Church*, *Sinners* as well as *Saints*, are the proper Subjects of *Goſpel Exhortation*. With what Eyes do they read the Bible, who think it unlawful to *exhort Sinners* to *repent*, and to *receive Chriſt*-

XXXV.

How great the Loſs! No more his charming Voice
The Wonders of Redeeming Grace can tell:
No more can make the Penitent rejoice,
Or Thunder Sinners from the Brink of Hell.

XXXVI.

No more direct the Pilgrim in his Way,
Nor ſhew the Self-Deceiver his Miſtake;
No more recall the Feet that go aſtray,
Nor with cloſe Searching make e'en good Men quake.

Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, and to *pray to God?* May I take the Liberty of putting a few Queries to ſuch? 1. If *Sinners* are not *commanded by God* to *receive* or *believe in Chriſt*, to *repent*, to *pray*; do they *ſin* in continuing *unbelieving*, *impenitent*, and in living without Prayer? 2. Are they at all to blame for *not doing* that which is *not their Duty*, either *mediately* or *immediately?* 3. If *God* commands them, is it unlawful for his *Miniſters* to command and exhort them in his Name? 4. Does not the Doctrine of ſuch juſtify all open Sinners in their Neglect of thoſe Duties which they ſuppoſe Perſons of their Deſcription are not to be exhorted to the Performance of, if they ſay God does not command or require the Performance of them? 5. Will ſuch a Juſtification, at God's Bar, either clear *diſobedient Sinners*, or juſtify *their own* Neglect of exhorting them to Obedience?

XXXVII. Now

XXXVII.

Now* recollect the Seaſons you've enjoy'd,
And how improv'd the Day of Goſpel Grace:
How have your Time and Talents been employ'd?
Are you prepar'd the Judge Supreme to face?

XXXVIII.

No more his friendly Hands can he extend
To reach Neceſſity his joyful Aid;
No more his fervent Prayers or Counſel lend;
Your Friend, your Paſtor, and your Father's dead.

XXXIX.

O feel your Loſs! Lament, and yet adore!
Remember God's ſevereſt Strokes are right:
Infinite Wiſdom, perfect Love and Power
Form joyous Day, and ſpread the Glooms of Night.

* How well would it be were thoſe who are favoured with the Means of Grace, and eſpecially with peculiar Advantages, to remember that they are accountable for their Uſe or Abuſe of them; and deeply ſenſible of their Importance, were they wiſely and faithfully to improve them! If inſtead of *trifling* with their *Souls*, with *Sermons*, and with *God*, they uſed the Means of Grace with *Humility* and *ſerious Diligence*, with Death and Judgment in their View!

XL.

What is amiſs with Diligence and Speed
Strive to amend, and in Life's happy Ways
Follow your Paſtor, while to Chriſt your Head
You look for rich Supplies of needful Grace.

XLI.

Nor only ponder on your Shepherd's Death,
But trace him to the Preſence of his LORD,
And with the piercing Eye of lively Faith,
Behold of Saints the vaſt yet free Reward.

XLII.

See plauſive Angels clap their golden Wings,
And tune their Harps to a ſublimer Key,
Behold them bear him to the King of Kings,
And joyful Aid his Song of Victory.

XLIII.

See JESUS, LORD of Angels, hail him Home,
And ſmiling crown him with eternal Joys;
While Thouſand holy happy Beings come,
And own the Man that led them to the Skies.

XLIV.

See from the Duſt his mortal Body riſe,
In Immortality and Glory bright;
Tears wip'd away from his rejoicing Eyes,
And endleſs Day ſucceeding Death's ſhort Night.

XLV.

O what a Harveſt of cœleſtial Light
Is ſown for thoſe who ſteadfaſtly adhere
To CHRIST their Guide, and thro' his Grace and Might,
O'ercome th' Aſſaults of all Oppoſers here!

XLVI.

Eſpecially his choſen faithful Train,
Who Terms of Peace to Rebel-Sinners bring,
Who lightly look on Labour, Scoffs, and Pain,
To gain new Subjects to their heavenly King.

XLVII.

O ye engag'd in ſuch a glorious Cauſe!
Can I refrain a ſerious Word to you?
Ye ſacred Heralds of the peaceful Croſs!
Now with freſh Zeal your arduous Work purſue.

XLVIII.

FLETCHER, your faithful Brother, now is gone!
How ſoon you'll follow, Mortals cannot tell:
Happy for you, if when your Labour's done,
Your Lord ſhall find your Work perform'd ſo well.

XLIX.

What Numbers may with ſelf-abaſing Shame
Think on the Life and Labours of the Dead!

How many glitt'ring in a pompous Name
May well with bluſhing hang a mitred Head!

L.

Where is the Man ſo much alive to God?
So zealous to promote the Saviour's Cauſe?
And while he truſts as firmly in His Blood,
As ſtrictly yields Obedience to His Laws?

LI.

Shake off dull Sloth, be active while you may,
Be all devoted to your Maſter's Will:
Think, ſpeak, live, labour, viſit, watch, and pray,
As thoſe that would their Embaſſy fulfil.

LII.

Time flies apace, your Hearers die away,
How quickly will they ſee your Face no more!
And you are dying Men as well as they;
O trifle not! The JUDGE is at the Door.

LIII.

The JUDGE, who is not to be mock'd with Show,
What are high Titles, rev'rend Garbs to HIM?
What heartleſs Forms? He ſees through all, for know,
His Eyes are Flame, though yours are blind or dim.

LIV.

O preach with Zeal, Affection, Faithfulneſs,
And plainly, ſo that all may underſtand:
Preach with an earneſt Longing for Succeſs,
As thoſe that ſee by Faith the Lord at Hand.

LV.

Proclaim what Sin and what a Saviour's done,
And point the guilty to atoning Blood;
To thoſe who wicked Ways refuſe to ſhun,
Denounce the Terrors of the Living GOD.

LVI.

The proud abaſe, bind up the broken Heart,
Lead on Immanuel's Armies to the Fight,
And in the Van do valiantly your Part,
Truſting for Vict'ry to your SAVIOUR's Might.

LVII.

With unextinguiſh'd Ardor in your Breaſt
Let * Love's illuſtrious Lamp perpetual flame;
While winning Condeſcenſion to the leaſt,
Gains them to Truth, and makes them love your Name.

* O Fœlix Hominum Genus, ſi veſtros Animos Amor quo Cœlum regitur regat. Bort.

LVIII. Nor

LVIII.

Nor be reluctant to ſupply their Need,
Count it your Duty and your Honour too;
The Naked cover, and the Hungry feed,
And thus your Faith by Works of Mercy ſhew.

LIX.

Sweet Peace and Harmony with all purſue,
Whom Chriſt as faithful to his Cauſe will own,
Tho' they in all Points think not juſt as you;
Alas, how *little's by the wiſeſt known.

LX.

What now remains? Unite in fervent Prayer,
To GOD for Aid, for Wiſdom, and Succeſs!
To humble Suppliants a gracious Ear
He lends, and ſtretches willing hands to bleſs.

* *Quantilla igitur, eſt Sapientia humana! Et proh qualis Doctiſſimorum Scientia! et quam pudendam ſuperbi iſti produnt Ignorantiam, qui adverſus Errores communes et tolerabiles quaſi Monſtra quædam nefanda furioſe vociferantur,* et *Fratres hæreticando Igne et Gladio eos perſequuntur, quum* SAPIENTISSIMI *aut* PHILOSOPHI, *aut* THEOLOGI *ne Rei minimæ vel notiſſimæ habent Scientiam quæ non ſit defectivè ſaltem falſa.*
BAXT. METH. THEOL.

LXI. Tho'

LXI.

Tho' Miniſters in quick Succeſſion * die,
He lives and keeps his Churches ſtill in Mind;
His Power and Grace their Loſſes can ſupply,
And for their Help unthought-of Succours find.

LXII.

To Him look up this Goſpel-Harveſt-Day,
To raiſe up faithful lab'rers for HIS Field;
That by his SPIRIT's Influence it may
A golden Store of heaven-born Converts yield.

LXIII.

To HIS great Name, the LORD of Life and Death,
Whoſe potent Arm kills, and reſtores again,
Be endleſs Honours paid by all that breathe,
While Worlds unknown unite their loud Amen!

* It is but a ſhort Time ſince I wrote an Elegy for that amiable Man, and my worthy Friend, the Rev. Dr. GIBBONS (publiſhed by J. BUCKLAND, *Paternoſter-Row*). He died laſt February, and now Mr. FLETCHER is gone: O ye Chriſtian Soldiers, when your Officers are thus taken out of the Field, let it not diſhearten you, and weaken your Hands; for JESUS, the Captain of Salvation, ſtill lives; but let it excite you to gird on more carefully your ſpiritual Armour, and to charge with renewed Vigour the Enemies that oppoſe your March to the Kingdom of your Lord and Saviour.

FINIS.

BRITISH MUSEUM